Masters in Art

A Series of Illustrated Monographs

Issued Monthly

EL GRECO

PART 103——VOLUME 9

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MASTERS IN ART

A SERIES OF ILLUSTRATED MONOGRAPHS: ISSUED MONTHLY

PART 103 JULY VOLUME 9

El Greco

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MASTERS IN ART

El Greco

SPANISH SCHOOL

EL GRECO
THE ANNUNCIATION
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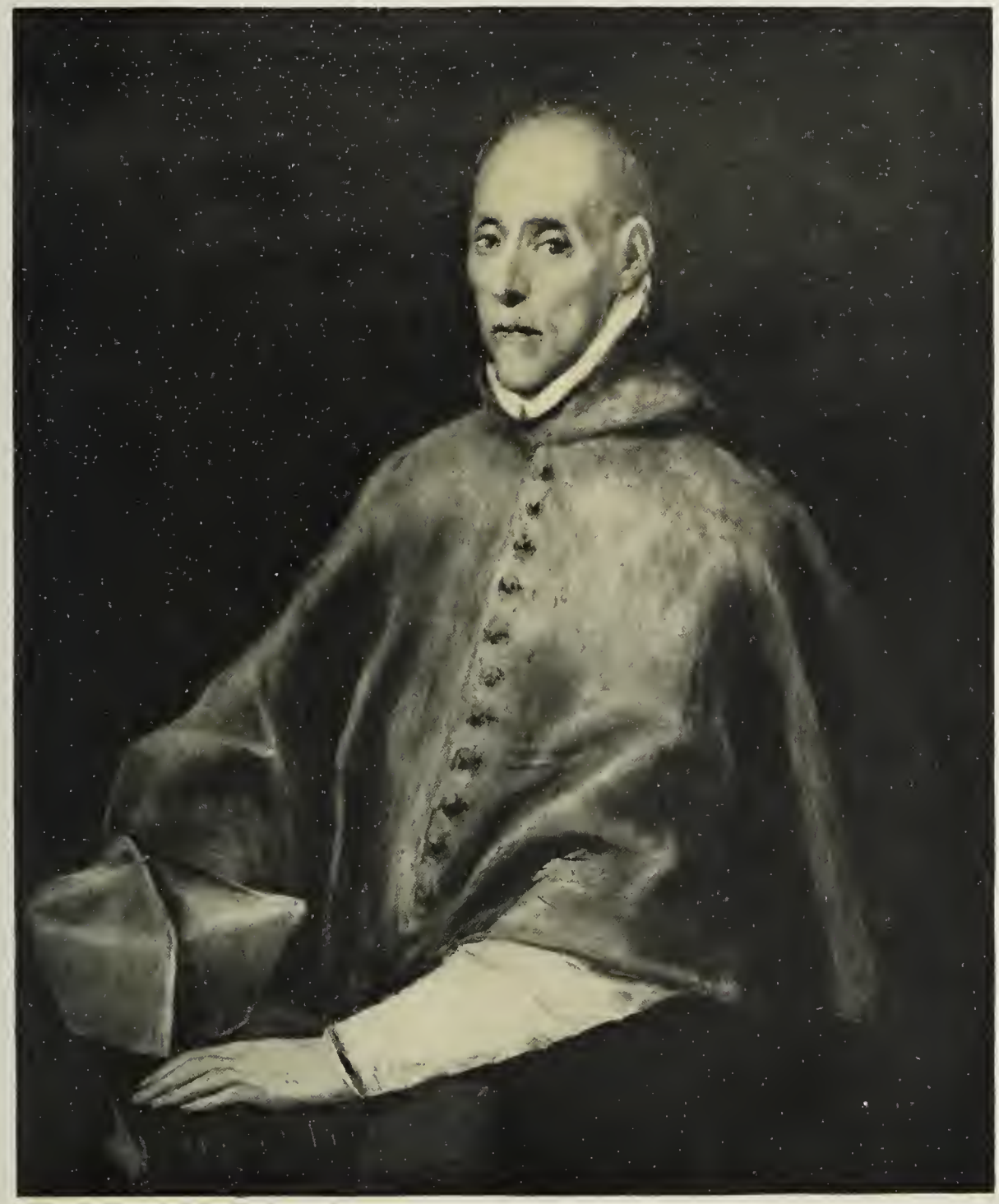
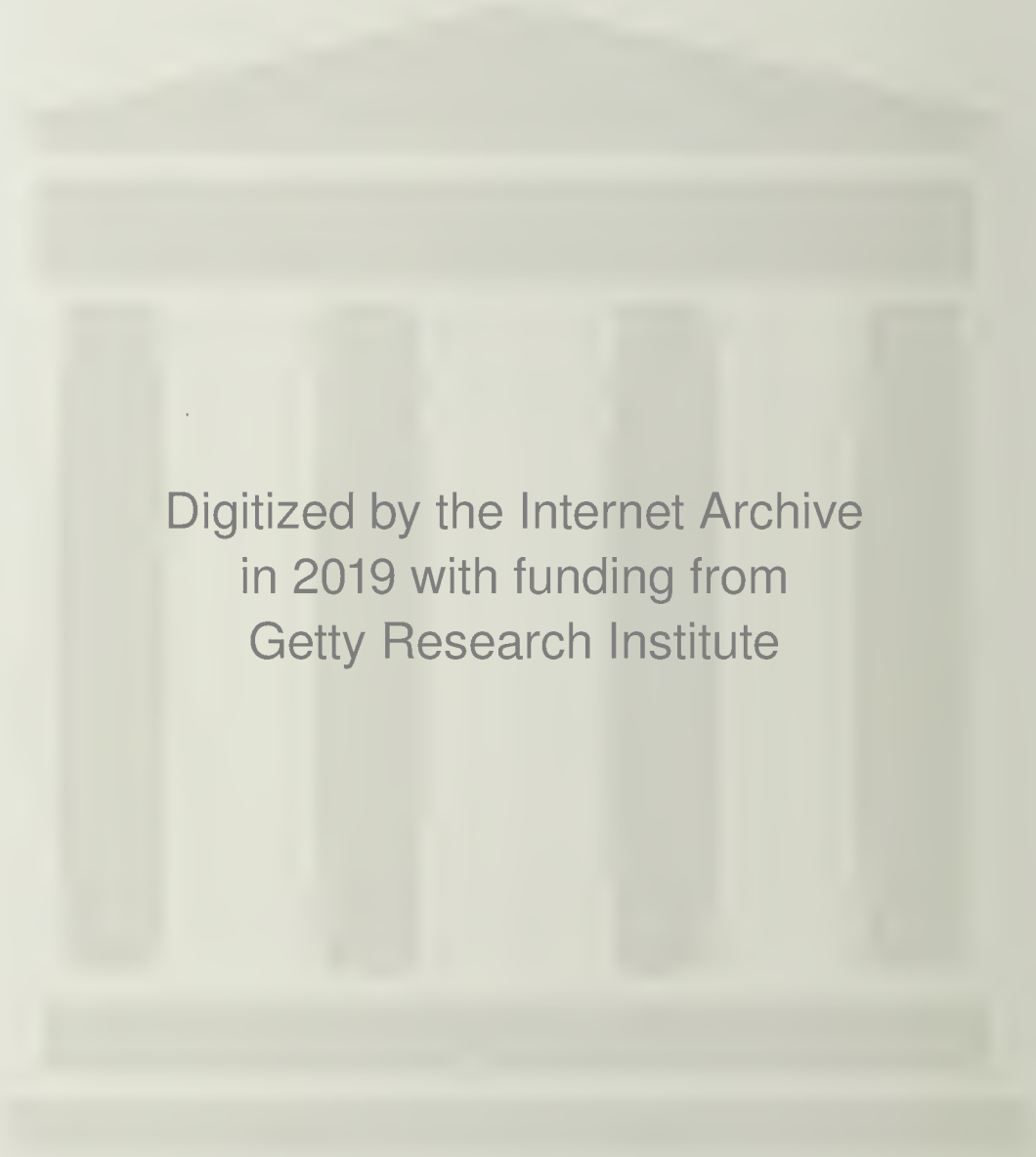


EL GRECO
PORTRAIT DU CARDINAL TAVERA
MUSEUM, TOLEDO

EL GRECO
THE ASSUMPTION
ART INSTITUTE, CHICAGO



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EL GRECO
PORTRAIT OF CARDINAL SFORZA PALLAVICINO
ART MUSEUM, BOSTON

EL GRECO
THE NATIVITY

EL GRECO
ST. BASIL
PRADO MUSEUM, MADRID

EL GRECO
PORTRAIT OF A PHYSICIAN
PRADO MUSEUM, MADRID

EL GRECO
PORTRAIT OF CARDINAL DON FERNANDO NIÑO DE GUEVARA
PRIVATE COLLECTION

EL GRECO
HEAD OF A MAN
PRADO MUSEUM, MADRID

EL GRECO
CHRIST DEAD IN THE ARMS OF GOD
PRADO MUSEUM, MADRID

El Greco

BORN 1548(?): DIED 1614
SPANISH SCHOOL

DOMENIKOS THEOTOKOPULI was born in the Island of Crete in the year 1547 or 1548. It is not known whether his youth was passed in his own Greece or in Venice. Venice was the great dominating Christian influence in all these isles and Levantine towns, and at just that time, when thousands of Greek refugees were fleeing to Venice from the power of the Turk, it would have been natural enough if the family of El Greco had been among them. The legend is that he studied with Titian; yet his name does not appear in the extant list of Titian's pupils. However, his countryman, the Macedonian Giulio Clovio, speaks of him in a letter as "a pupil of Titian." However that may be, he absorbed the Venetian manner simply enough, and at the time of his coming to Spain he was quite Titianesque in style, although even as early as that his work had its own strong individuality.

He was called to Spain and settled in Toledo, as his first work was there. There is a good deal of confusion about the term "El Greco." It means, of course, "The Greek." But in the right Spanish it should be "El Griego." It would seem, however, that he got the nickname during his years in Italy, and was called by the Italians "Il Greco" when he first went to Spain. The Spaniards adopted the name, gave it their own characteristic article, and called him "El Greco," or sometimes plain "Greco." The French do the same thing when they call him, as they always do, "Le Greco." And we, if we were consistent with them, would call him "The Greco." But we, in our haphazard English way, have for the most part elected to call him after the Spanish nomenclature. And by the title "El Greco" he is known, as far as he is known at all, among us. "Theotokopuli" is rather a mouthful at the best. It was the pleasant manner of the Italians to give nicknames to their painters, as Masaccio, Giorgione, and Perugino, or "Slovenly Tom," "Big George," and "The Man from Perugia," and so one may suppose the name "El Greco" came about.

There is the same confusion about his given name and his patronymic. His name in Greek was Κυριακός Θετοκόπουλος, or in the Latin lettering Kiriakos Theotocopuli, Dominico being the Italian for Kiriakos. He seems to have been called Domenico in Italy; but with a certain perverseness he preferred

to spell it in a half Greek way, Domenikos. He often had the habit — affectation, if you will — of signing his canvases in the Greek lettering. Indeed, he was well read in Greek, and in a country where culture was not very widely spread he must have passed for a learned man. As to his last name, it is indifferently spelled Theotokopuli, Theotokopulos, Teotocopuli, or Theotocopuli in various archives.

It is curious, by the way, that he should have been a Greek, because nothing could be more different from what we have come to call the Hellenic spirit than the soul that animated his work. Greek art, as we know it, is based on proportion, measure, balance. Some of its leading qualities are serenity, reserve, workmanship. Now the art of him they called "The Greek" is different in all things, for his work is violent, perturbed, careless in execution. It was written that he of the ancient classic race should be the first of the moderns.

It would be hard to imagine one who differed in more ways than he from the calculated, carefully poised art which we call classic. There is nothing of the unthinking serenity of Greece in his types; they are tortured and quite modern in expression. Half gods or Titans at the best, these men of his have little likeness to the Greek gods of High Olympus.

No doubt the grim, austere city of Toledo had its influence upon El Greco and upon his art. He had been accustomed to happy and joyous Venice, where things were seen through a golden rain of sunlight. And here in Toledo was sunlight, to be sure, but of another quality. Here were gaunt, grim shapes wholly Gothic or Moorish, wholly different from the rich, colored Byzantine forms of the beloved Venice and of a farther Greece. And the proud, severe, austere Spanish types about him were different enough from the smiling, ease-loving Italian faces he had come to know in Venice.

So, in the end, his painting became strange and more strange. He alternated in his work, now doing a picture that was quite "sane," as the writers of to-day like to put it; again, making a picture so wild as to puzzle the grim Philip II. and his court.

It is the test and measure of a man what use he makes of his ability; how he develops after leaving the nest, as it were, of master and brother pupils; and El Greco met this test strongly, for his Venetian art, though much more individual than that of his fellows, still smacked of Venetian color and manner. He had something in his work of that rich, warm Venetian glow so often talked of. There is a legend, probably apocryphal, that he was irritated when his canvases were compared to Titian and determined to show that he could paint better and in a different manner. However this may be, his manner certainly changed greatly during his stay in Spain. It is more likely that solitude in Toledo, not seeing other painters who were his equals, caused him to fall back upon himself and to create a style almost of necessity personal.

Something of his early Venetian training, however, no doubt persists, even in his latest work. He retained the trick of glazing, so beloved of Venetians, though he apparently varied it by scumbling, a method not so much used by his masters. At all events, something of this thin, sleazy way of smearing on

the paint in certain passages was adopted by Velasquez, whose earliest manner was quite different, being in the heavy, robust, not to say stodgy technique which he first learned from Herrera. The big picture by Herrera in the Worcester Art Museum illustrates this manner well enough. Greco's manner is quite different from this: he is always glazing and smearing. One notices glazes especially in the finger-tips of his portraits.

El Greco was in more than one respect the Whistler of his day. He had much of the latter's wit; he had an uncommon way of painting; and, among other things, he had Whistler's passion for litigation. Only the Greek, more fortunate than the man from Lowell, won all his suits. It is recorded that when the Inquisition accused him of controverting certain canonical rules in some of his pictures, he had the courage — and courage it was in those days — to defy it and bring suit against the all-powerful institution. Strange to say, he won his case.

In those days there was a sort of tariff on the sale of each picture. El Greco thought this unfair and refused to pay it. A suit brought before the Royal Counsel of the Hacienda was decided in his favor. And it was proclaimed that henceforth the three arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture were forever exempt from duties or imposts.

There is no definite statement extant about his exact technique, but by carefully studying his works one can arrive at a pretty good understanding of the manner of it. It is fair to suppose that his early style was much the manner that Titian taught and that the other young Venetians practised. Very likely he under-painted in gray tempera body color and glazed plentifully over that. Later, he very much modified this manner and came to paint in what must have been a good deal the modern manner; that is, painting in the picture quite directly and then constantly repainting or retouching. He, however, glazed much more than is commonly done nowadays.

El Greco is, in a sense, one of our modern discoveries. Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, it is true, speaks of him as early as 1848, and at considerable length, but with quite complete misapprehension. In his "goguenard" and robust way, he feels that there is something interesting in the Greek painter, but fails to put his finger on it. So that any real effort to understand El Greco has come about of later years. Indeed, it may be doubted if the mind of the world has ever before been so nearly in the right state to appreciate the Toledan painter's rather bitter and evasive charm. He suits our desire for novelty; he chimes in with our sense of the mutability of things; and as nowadays, whether rightly or wrongly, we are all for personality even if it be at the expense of craftsmanship, his very marked personality interests us.

With other painters the personality of the man is or is not an interesting trait. With El Greco it is almost the whole thing. One might almost say he is nothing but personality. He is like Perique tobacco, which is very good for giving a flavor to other brands, but rather heady when smoked alone. Well, it takes a strong head to enjoy El Greco. His flavor is too strong and of too bizarre and racy a quality to be enjoyed by every one. In other men, personality will show in choice or arrangement of subject, perhaps in a cer-

tain rare quality of color; but with our Greek the personality cries aloud with every stroke of the brush. It is this that has kept him from due recognition; it is this, too, which makes him a particular favorite with the *raffiné* and discerning.

El Greco was the inventor, so to say, of the "muted" tones, the smoky blacks, the dingy whites, which Velasquez, in a measure, adopted, and which Whistler later developed into so taking an article of commerce. That is, the Greek was the first man, so far as appears, to treat tones in that way. In the work of his master Titian the whites are quite frankly white; the blacks, though suggesting color, still of a blackness, as dark as may be in the accents. With El Greco, the rendering of these muted tones was not so much a mannerism as a perception of the delicate bloom which light sheds on the "local color" of things. And this was a subtlety of vision, a perception of nuance, that till then had been wanting in painters' work. How much these qualities suggested anything to Velasquez we do not absolutely know. But we do know that Velasquez's earliest work was hot and unluminous, quite in the manner of Herrera, and that in his latest work he developed those so-called "silvery tones" which are also among the distinguishing qualities of El Greco.

Our master had all a Venetian's skill in landscape-painting when he first came to Spain, and he quickly learned to render the peculiar beauty of Spanish landscape, and mostly the sort that is seen about Toledo. He seemed to love, and well recorded, its austere grandeur; and in the backgrounds of some of his figure compositions are bits of landscape which might well have filled in some canvas of Velasquez. Indeed, it is impossible not to feel that the latter had seen and studied this feature of Theotokopuli's work, for many of his landscape backgrounds have the same long, swinging lines, the same free, loose manner of handling.

It is a strange thing that El Greco should have so well assimilated the formula of the Spanish type, that he should have understood it so well, and that he, a foreigner, should have painted Spaniards more "like" than they could paint themselves. For when a Frenchman, or any other Outlander, comes to America to paint portraits, he makes little Frenchmen of our cowboy Presidents, of our grim captains and *Chevaliers de l'Industrie*. But it was not so with El Greco. No one, better than he, has understood and rendered the cold morgue of the Spanish grandee — fire under ice. And he, too, has well understood the Spanish churchman, and his portraits of various Spanish cardinals are among the best of his work.

Another quality, which one might say was invented by El Greco, was a loose, free, almost feathery handling, which, while it injured his workmanship, did in a measure suggest the floating, ever-changing aspect of nature in a way which the solid, well-considered draftsmanship of the Venetians had hardly done. Still less had the heavy, rather stodgy handling of Herrera and his ilk suggested this constant mutability of things.

El Greco, like a true innovator, felt this so strongly, had so acute a sense of the change, the "va et vient" of living things, that he was sometimes content to let the form go unchastened, if he had given it the breath of life; so that

some of his creations are like Frankenstein's monster, palpably alive, yet hardly human.

El Greco has to his credit, if it be a credit, that he was one of the first Impressionists, and by "impressionism" one means the word in its broader sense rather than in the more restricted meaning of painting in pure color, which is most often given it nowadays. For he told the scandalized Pacheco, when the latter visited him in Toledo, that he believed in constant retouching and repainting, which tended to make the broad masses tell flat as in nature. This is quite the doctrine of the "tache" so beloved by Manet, and his manner of retouching here, there, and elsewhere is much like the style of Chardin, Monet, and of our own Tarbell.

No doubt Pacheco, who was father-in-law to Velasquez, sometimes whispered these heresies with bated breath to his clever pupil. And certainly Velasquez succeeded in rendering the "apparition" of things even more successfully than the old Greek. But "*au fond*" Velasquez was essentially a modeler, and more, too; he always tried for the flowing surface of paint, the "fused" look which his best paintings have. So that, in this respect, his method may be called quite different from the patchy facture of Theotokopuli.

What El Greco may have suggested to him, however, was a way of looking at nature without prejudice, spot for spot. The Italians, even the best of them, always treated a man by the way the forms ran. El Greco, and after him Velasquez, were the first to see nature with the "innocent eye," putting a dark spot here, a lighter tone there, as they came, without "*parti-pris*" as to their exact meaning. In El Greco this is tentative; he still paints along the form instead of across it with the light. Yet the effect of his work is more impressionistic than most that had preceded it.

It has been already hinted that Velasquez was a good deal influenced by the art of Greco, and in an indirect way it would seem that he doubtless was. If this be so, it may have come about by conversations with his father-in-law Pacheco, who knew El Greco and had argued with him about art; although it is quite evident that if Pacheco admired the Toledan master in some respects, he still highly disapproved of certain of his practices. Velasquez may have heard about El Greco from the latter's favorite pupil Tristan, though Tristan's work does not much recall the master, being heavier and made with more care, yet lacking in charm. Or, what seems most likely of all, Velasquez had, no doubt, seen El Greco's work at Toledo, and being the most thoughtful and analytic of men, by much study he may have divined some of the Toledan's secrets; have known, and that was his great gift, which to take and which to leave.

Theotokopuli is said to have written a book or treatise about art. Whatever this may have been, it has now wholly disappeared, and this one must feel to be a great pity, for it would be interesting to know the views of so independent and unusual a painter. It is to be regretted that all painters have not written on the practice of their art. What a library of information we should have; and, more than that, what a side-light on the intentions and meaning of each painter would be his comments on his own work and his description of his

own manner of working! But whatever he may have written, it does not now survive, and we shall never know what the strange old man thought about the practice of his art.

But at the very last, El Greco, though interesting in himself, is most interesting historically, as a link between the old and new. He is one of those men — the Impressionists are his brothers in this — who dimly felt or divined certain subtleties, refinements, *nuances*, which till then had not been expressed. Indeed, he felt them so strongly that in the passion of their rendering he sometimes forgot or slurred the old perfections. Other men, like Velasquez, perceiving these qualities in his work, were able to express them in their own, while not sacrificing the other verities as he had done. It is the fate of innovators to be obsessed by their own discoveries. *L'Idée fixe* tortures their mind and obscures other verities. They are the victims of their truth. And El Greco was no exception to this. And yet they have this reward — that they are sometimes more interesting to subtle minds than are men of more triumphant and absolute ability. Greco is not comparable to Rubens, for instance, as an all-round artist and master of technique. And yet, to certain minds, he must always seem a more interesting painter, infinitely more distinguished. And where he often failed in rendering the obvious — so unlike Rubens — he sometimes felt and suggested subtleness of expression — *nuances* of light and tone which the healthy Fleming would never have even suspected. He is, to use an expression rapidly becoming *banale*, a painter's painter. Millet delighted in his picture of St. Ildefonso and had an engraving of it, which is now owned by Mr. Degas. Zuloaga and other Spanish painters are said to consider El Greco the superior even of Velasquez. One is not prepared to agree with this. Yet the mere suggestion shows how sympathetic is the work of our subject to many painters of ability.

El Greco, then, was an innovator, a man who felt and suggested many things, yet was not perfect in his rendering of any of them. Mr. McColl has made a half-humorous division of painters into Titans and Olympians. Well, then, our Greek was in some sense a Titan, if a man so neurotic as he could be called a Titan. At least, there was nothing Olympian about him. No, he was hardly a Titan or even a half-god, not even a super-man; for there was little of the "Laughing Lion" in him. Rather, he was one of those men, fortunate or unfortunate as you will, made for a time in the future. How lonely he must have been in Toledo, even with Cervantes and Lope da Vega as neighbors! And even now there would be few to understand him. What the other men thought most important seemed to him distressingly obvious. The things which to him seemed all important, they had never seen.

The Art of El Greco

CARL JUSTI 'DIEGO VELASQUEZ AND HIS TIMES'

A PROOF of the attraction Venetian art had for the Spanish eye is seen in the welcome given to the works of El Greco. At the very time a Navarrese was for the first time painting in the Titian manner in the Escorial, Toledo was visited by a Cretan Greek, who, like Antonio Vassilacchi of Milo, known as l'Aliense, had studied the Venetian style at the fountainhead. He was traditionally, and doubtless justly, regarded as a pupil of Titian, although his signature is always in Greek, with a Latin translation of his Christian name Kyriakos: Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος Κρήσὲποίει. This artist is as remarkable for his rare pictorial genius, and for the impulse given by him to Spanish painting, as for unexampled and in fact pathological debasement of his later manner. Biographers have hitherto studied him only from the time of his arrival in Spain (1575), but there still exist a number of authentic works belonging to his Italian period, works which rank with the best productions of the Venetian school. Nobody being aware of his existence, these works, notwithstanding their peculiar physiognomy, have long passed for Titians, Paul Veroneses, Bassanos, and even Baroccis. They are partly portraits, partly animated gospel scenes in bold lines, and in the attitudes resembling Tintoretto, but richer in individuality and more solid in the coloring. Vistas of distant hills beyond the marble-paved piazzas and line of palaces give them a strong Venetian accent. He is also influenced by Michael Angelo, as seen in many of the figures; and what is stranger still, old Byzantine reminiscences are betrayed in his invention and grouping.

The Greek signature of El Greco occurs on the 'Healing of the Man Blind from his Birth,' in the Parma Gallery, of which a modified but unsigned replica exists in the Dresden Collection. He often depicted 'The Cleansing of the Temple,' a large specimen of which formerly in the Buckingham Collection, is now in the possession of the Countess of Yarborough, catalogued as a Paul Veronese. But his most comprehensive creation is the 'Disrobing of the Saviour on Calvary,' formerly in the Manfrin Gallery, and assigned to Barocci. Christ stands in the center, an embodiment of sublime resignation, His large, brilliant eyes turned upwards; to the left, lower down, three noble female figures; to the right, a man with the borer stooping over the Cross. Behind tower up the heads and busts of the thronging troops, the captain of the armor on Christ's right hand, the man seizing His red mantle on His left. It would be difficult to find a work of the Venetian school richer in studies of character than this 'Disrobing.'

That he was at that time an eminent portraitist is evident from the half-length of the miniature-painter Giulio Clovio, in the Naples Studj, which in Parma passed as a portrait of himself. So also the study of light effects, 'The Boy Blowing a Coal,' in the Naples Museum. That portrait of Clovio supplies a conjecture as to El Greco's hitherto unknown career in Italy.

He may perhaps have introduced himself as a fellow countryman of the aged Clovio, who calls himself a Macedonian. His skill at miniature is revealed in one of his best early works, a replica of the 'Cleansing of the Temple' on a small scale, with sumptuous architecture and ornamental details, in Mr. Francis Cook's collection, Richmond. In the already mentioned large piece we see in the right corner four half-figures — the aged Titian, Michael Angelo, an old man (probably Clovio), and a young man with index finger pointing to his face, possibly the artist himself, indicating thus to whom he felt indebted. In any case his youth has been rich in experience, and Pacheco, who made his acquaintance in old age, calls him a "great philosopher," full of wise sayings and author of a treatise on painting, sculpture, and architecture.

In 1575 he made his appearance in Toledo, which he never again quitted, dying there in 1614. During these forty years he displayed an almost boundless activity, filling the Castilian churches with altar-pieces, the halls of prelates and cavaliers with portraits. But only in the earliest is his Venetian manner preserved. The first, which apparently brought him to Toledo, is the reredos in the Church of Santo Domenigo de Silos, where the architectural framework on the statues is also by him. The central and chief piece is the 'Assumption,' now in Pau, but a copy of which is still on the spot. The elements of the Frari altar-piece here reappear, but already in the Spanish environment. Mary soars aloft with outstretched arms in ecstatic emotion. The Apostles are men from the Toledo mountains, who, like true Castilians, express their amazement still with dignity in a slow, solemn gesture-language. The picture is thrown on the canvas with surprising power of chiaroscuro and in richly varied, deep, glowing color.

This performance opened El Greco's way to the cathedral. Invited to execute the central piece for the new and spacious sacristy, he resolved to figure his 'Christ on Calvary' on an imposing scale. This chief work and masterpiece of his, occupying an honorable place in the richest church in Spain, for the first time in that country gave an idea of Titian's art — his plastic power, his vivid light and shade, his naturalism. In his capacity as a colorist El Greco here proclaimed himself king.

But he was unable to keep on the high level of this work. Drunk with applause, unwarned by associates or judges whom he might have well respected, in the pride of his triumph, piqued at the compliment that "he painted like Titian," he degenerated into that reckless manner in which, as in the speech of "a noble, unstrung mind," only flashes of his genius still occasionally gleam forth in those marvelous physiognomies and daring strokes of the brush. In Toledo's crumbling eyrie, isolated from healthy influences, he sank lower and lower, painting like a visionary and taking for revelations the distorted fancies of a morbid brain.

In portraiture alone a spark survived of his former greatness. Those of Pompeo Leoni at Keir in Dumfriesshire, and of the gray-haired Cardinal Quiroga (?) in the cathedral sacristy, Valladolid, still give a good notion of his powers; whereas the specimens in the Prado Museum are unfortunately

very mannered. In St. Thomé is a large picture, which, strange to say, passes in Spain as his masterpiece, although executed in his worst style. A group of cavaliers in the black dress of the Court of Philip II. assist at the burial of Count Orgaz, whose body is being lowered into the grave by two ghostly figures, in whom one recognizes SS. Augustine and Stephen. "Around this painting," we are told, "the Toledans often gathered, still discovering something new in the portraits of so many cavaliers." And in truth, at sight of these stiff, ceremonious attitudes, these grave, motionless glances, giving the impression of an assembly of apparitions, one must fain confess that the foreign artist has a good eye for national peculiarities.

As religious enthusiasts precede the creative innovators of the times, this Iberianized Greek was a precursor of the masters that arose in the following century.

SIR WILLIAM STIRLING-MAXWELL 'ANNALS OF THE ARTISTS OF SPAIN'

EL GRECO has been justly described as an artist who alternated between reason and delirium, and displayed his great genius only at lucid intervals. There is probably no other painter who has left so many admirable and so many execrable performances. Strange to say, in his case, the critics cannot fix the epoch when his "early bad manner" gave way to his "good middle-style," or when his pencil lost the charm of its prime; for he painted well and ill by turns throughout his whole career. The disagreeable 'St. Maurice' was executed between the times when his two best works were commenced. The finest portraits of Tavera and Palavicino were painted in or about 1609, which is also the date of his delightful 'Holy Family' and his offensive 'Baptism of Christ' at the Toledan Hospital of St. John Baptist. In the latter picture, the narrow draperies, and the gleams of light, thin and sharp as Toledo sword-blades, produce effects not less unpleasing than difficult to be described intelligibly to those who are unacquainted with the Greek's style. He might have painted it, by the fitful flashes of lightning, on a midsummer night, from models dressed only in floating ribands. In the Louvre we find near his excellent portraits an 'Adoration of the Shepherds,' in his most extravagant style, in which the lights on reddish draperies and dark clouds are expressed by green streaks of so unhappy a tint that those harmless objects resemble masses of bruised and discolored flesh. Yet the perpetrator of these enormities sometimes painted heads that stood out from the canvas with the sober strength of Velasquez's, and colored pictures and draperies with a splendor rivaling Titian. With all his faults, El Greco was a favorite artist in Spain, and his pictures were highly valued. For the church of Bayena, a village in the province of Segovia, he executed a series of paintings on the life of Mary Magdalene, which were refused, about the close of the seventeenth century, to Cardinal Puertocarrero, although his Eminence offered to buy them for 5,000 crowns, and replace them with pictures by Luca Giordano, the famous and fashionable court artist of the day.

Theotocopuli was much engaged as sculptor and architect. At Madrid he designed, in 1590, the church of the College of Doña Maria de Arragon, and

carved the "abominable" retablo of the high altar; at Illescas he built, about 1600, two churches—that of the Hospital of Charity, still existing, with its good classical altar, and that of the Franciscan friars, with marble tombs and effigies of the Hinojosas, its founders, now demolished; at Toledo, he gave the plans of the city hall, a solid plain building of two stories, resting on Doric pillars and flanked with towers; he carved, in 1609, the retablos for the church of the St. John Baptist's Hospital; and, in 1611, he erected in the Cathedral, by order of the chapter, the catafalque, or temporary monument for the celebration of funeral solemnities for Margaret of Austria, Queen of Philip III.

Few artists were ever more unweariedly industrious than El Greco, even in his old age. Never idle for a moment, he must have not a little astonished, by his indomitable energy, the slow and otiose Toledans amongst whom he lived. Pacheco, who visited him in 1611, relates that he showed him a large closet filled with the plaster models of his various sculptures, and a chamber full of sketches of all his pictures. In the course of their talk El Greco declared his opinion that coloring was a more difficult part of the painter's art than drawing, and that Michael Angelo, "though a good professor, knew nothing of painting." Besides uttering these heresies, to the horror of the Sevillian, he explained and defended his own harsh and spotty style, avowing that it was his practice to retouch a picture till each mass of color was distinct and separate from the rest, and asserting that it gave strength and character to the whole. But in spite of his eccentric style and opinions, the school of Theotocopuli produced Maino, Tristan, and Orrente, who rank among the best Castilian painters. He was a man of wit and some learning, and is said by Pacheco to have written on the three arts which he professed.

RICHARD MUTHER 'HISTORY OF PAINTING'

NOTWITHSTANDING Justi's investigations, the chief master of Toledo, Domenico Theotocopuli of Crete, deserves a new biographer. For the "pathological degeneration" of El Greco seems an important symptom of the great religious fermentation which at that time had seized all minds. Pictures like his 'Purification of the Temple,' in which he appears as a Venetian, express but little; although the theme seems in some wise related with the purification of the Church at that time by Caraffa and Loyola. But in the work which introduced him to Spain, 'Christ Stripped of His Garments on Calvary,' he has freed himself from Titian, and now seems a savage entering the world of art with impetuous primeval power. He displays a collection of herculean figures composed of real flesh and blood, of barbaric bone and marrow. The same quality gives his painting of the 'Holy Trinity' a primeval, brutal grandeur. His picture in the Church of San Tomé in Toledo, in which the members of a knightly order solemnly attend the funeral of Count Orgaz, his corpse is lowered into the grave by two saints, while Christ, Mary, martyrs, and angels hover in the air — this painting, in its abrupt union of actual with transcendental, already heralds the visionary painting of the seventeenth century. His later works are uncanny, ghostly pictures of exaggerated line and harsh color; which seem to be executed in wax colors mingled with the

mold of corpses. In all respects he seems a strange, titanic master; and not until more is known of his life will he stand revealed as an artist.

C. S. RICKETTS 'THE ART OF THE PRADO'

EL GRECO was trained in Venice, and in his earlier manner is a pure Venetian, influenced by the work of Bassani and stimulated by the manner of Tintoretto. He was born in Crete in 1548, and died at Toledo in 1614. This painter developed on Spanish soil a style that seems almost more Spanish in temper than the work of any born and bred Spaniard till the advent of Goya, in whom all the national traits find expression. Outwardly the more central of El Greco's work seems founded entirely upon Tintoretto at his wildest and most mannered phase; his figures are torn to shreds by a wind of passion, by an extravagant effort at impressiveness. His method in portraits recalls the method of the Bassani; but with time the fever latent in his art takes a form more acute, and in his Toledan manner the Venetian influence burns less visibly. Realities are then supplanted by a series of conventions of his own; the Venetian methods are finally replaced by the most wilful experiments in form and color and in the use of pigments; human forms are twisted and stretched into mere symbols of themselves, or into symbols of passion and movement. A wish to be inspired and original at all costs clashes with the staid tendency of the Spanish temper, it is true; yet where out of Spain could so strange and perverted a vision of things have found acceptance; when, save in the reign of Philip II?

His pictures might at times have been painted by torchlight in a cell of the Inquisition. Philip II. in his old age might have so painted, had he been given the faculty to paint. El Greco's 'Vision of Philip II.' might have actually risen before the recluse of the Escorial himself, when, after so much done and undone, after so many acts of faith, he lay dying by inches under the black velvet of his bed; when under the horsehair shirt he felt the approach of eternity, and beyond the incense fumes and the smoke of the tapers stood the goal of all his effort.

At times Theotocopuli is a sincere and almost naïve artist; in portraits of small surface area and unambitious scope he is quite excellent; at times his feverish workmanship has the "quality of its defects" (if we may be pardoned this transposition of a French phrase which nevertheless expresses perfectly the singular case presented to us in the work of El Greco).

We understand the power to disturb, which the religious revival brought in its wake, when we touch the art of El Greco — a sense of trouble has been detected even in the light work of Titian himself. If we turn on the art of Tintoretto, who was the main influence upon El Greco, the tendency of agitation seems to spring from a different source, even in such works as the 'Holy Supper' at St. Giorgio Maggiore, with its fantastic torchlight, and presence of spiritual forms in the air of the room itself. The aim of Tintoretto was sensational, but eloquent in its sensationalism; its tendency was declamatory and romantic, tending always towards an emphatic statement of dramatic or romantic effects. With El Greco the imaginative impulse flickers and twists

upon itself; there is even less balance than in the Italian, there is even less room, less breathing-space for sequence of thought, or for constructive vision; he gives you a sort of shorthand of Tintoretto, and later on mere jottings and hints at a method of his own; at times his figures have the lithe and trenchant aspect of a sword.

The color of his whites and crimsons is ashen; his blacks, vivid; his blues remind one of the blues of steel; his use of green is constant and unusual for painting of his time.

Light with him becomes a quantity for emotional appeal only, to be focused or scattered at will, and he will paint a sky black or a bitter green.

The influence of Veronese's early manner has been instanced as the first influence upon the aspect of his earliest and least individualized works; yet nothing could be more remote in temper or tendency than these two paintings. Had Veronese, with his unbounded and almost monotonous control over plastic effect, painted only the strange little 'Crucifixion' in the Louvre, with its strange green sky, its strange and chilly color, the difference between the Venetian master and the Spanish mannerist would still be immense. His most ascetic and monkish canvases degenerate into what looks like a parody of himself; he even at times turns away from his curious palettes and, with blue-black, white, and brown, produces a yet more bitter, I had almost said discordant, result.

No one would apply to the work of El Greco the statement that art is the expression of that which the artist likes best in life; his choice would seem to have been governed by another craving, and to have been of the nature that makes a man lean over a precipice to see if he will feel faint and dizzy, or a patient touch a wound to see if it will hurt.

This estimate of El Greco gives him an undue importance, perhaps, for his work is more individual than original, and the basis of individuality does not suffice for art; originality must be found in its essence, not the mere expression of personal limitations, as with El Greco; and above originality stands the creative power, that noblest expression with which modern criticism hardly ever concerns itself at all.

The personality or originality of El Greco is too thin, too whimsical, too arbitrary, to command absolute praise. His was in no sense a constructive temperament; his originality as a painter consists largely in his power of scattering and decomposing the convention of others.

His human type, when he condescends in his pictures to give attention to this, is a low one, much lower than Tintoretto's; a dilated eye does duty for expression. The 'Descent of the Holy Spirit,' still catalogued at the Prado, shows this unwillingness to realize things plastically, and his trust to a wild form of improvisation; yet the picture attracts by its flame-like aspect. The 'Baptism of Christ' in the Prado is a more responsible work. One detects in the extravagant mannerism of the forms an idealizing tendency, notably in the delicate hands and long feet; the angels, with their doll-like faces, support a large crimson mantle, in itself a delightful "painter's motive," forming as it does a sort of niche for the figure of the Saviour; the St. John shows a sensi-

tiveness of type we find sometimes in El Greco's portraits; at his feet is the stump of a felled tree and an axe; but where the art-lover is charmed out of criticism is in the treatment of the heaven above, in which we forget the small, doll-like faces of the spirits in the visionary and instantaneous effect of the whole, the blotches of vivid electric cloud in which dart and shimmer the flame-like forms of little baby angels, each in its little world of cloud and light; they are like birds who, thrown up into the air, tumble and quiver before regaining the use of their wings.

We find further evidence of painter's delight in the mottled sky and the three white mitres of the 'St. Bernard' hanging near. In the fine early picture of the 'Ascension,' painted when El Greco was twenty-three (lent by the Infanta Isabella of Bourbon), we notice a more careful, a more thoroughly worked-out attempt at that originality El Greco strove for all his life under the accusation of being an imitator of Titian and Tintoretto; in this and in the 'Trinity' he produced there is more variety in the heads, a more plastic use of the brush, a more vivid use of color — green, crimson, straw-yellow, blue, orange, lavender — and a sort of vinous and stain-like quality in the paint itself. Velasquez remembered the color of this work in his 'Coronation of the Virgin.'

We cannot deny to El Greco a certain visionary quality: a poor replica hangs in the Prado of his 'Burial of the Count of Organza,' the original being at Toledo. This picture shares with his 'Theban Legion' at the Escorial the claim to be El Greco's most typical work. Against a space of abstract color flickers the light of a few torches, which illumine a row of vivid portrait heads, cut off by their white ruffs and isolated in space; seen out of relation to each other, yet dominated by a sense of awe and piety. Some are ecstatic, others self-absorbed; below this band of fervent faces glimmers the exaggerated whiteness, the exaggerated elegance, of a few hands; and the central group, at first dominated by the row of spectators, emerges from the gloom in flashes of gold, white, steel-blue, as the noble figure of an old bishop bends beneath the weight of a man in armor whom they are about to entomb, and who is supported also by a deacon in embroidered vestments. The group is admirably invented, full of a passionate awe and tenderness; the shroud of gray-white against the black armor, the large white mitre of the bishop, are all admirable "painter's inventions." The upper part of the picture is a confused and swaying mass of angels and holy persons drifting on large strata of strange cloud-forms, lit from within. El Greco's human type, even in his portraits, is odd, fervent, pointed in brow and lacking a back and base to the cranium; there are fervor and elegance in his work, which on the average is whimsical and hasty.

This decadent artist has at least one virtue, which we find in several decadents — that in aim, if fatuous, he was not commonplace. Sensational, impatient, and extravagant as he is, El Greco never meant to appeal to common and comfortable ideals. He also saves us from that somewhat unthinking and unemotional point of view which marks the decadent but by no means unattractive or unimportant work of mannerists such as the Italians Parmigianino and Baroccio.

But what is decadence? Below the surface of much decadent art lies, unbalanced, it is true, a wish to stimulate and charm, such as is ever present in classical art itself. I am reminded of the confession of a drunkard, whose excuse for getting drunk was not that he liked drinking, but that he liked to "see things more interesting than they were." In this sense El Greco wished to make things seem "more interesting than they were;" but, unlike most decadents, his method was limited and often insufficient, and, like Blake the mystic, he was not always as much under the influence of his artistic or spiritual Dæmon as he imagined. With El Greco the spectator is invited to a display of artistic fireworks which does not always come off, but unmistakably smokes and sputters.

We have not applied the word "decadent" to El Greco to indicate a merely decaying and derelict type, such as each school and nation may show at times — men who are merely bad artists and poor craftsmen; in this sense the popular English painter may be a decadent, however "popular" or "wholesome" his aim; whether he paints 'Cattle in a Surrey Field' or 'Well-known Footsteps.' El Greco belongs to a genuine type of artists in whom the proper balance between aim and achievement is disturbed by something feverish and lacking in the sense of intellectual responsibility. He belongs to a class of artists in whom we find, on a different level, even such great names as Botticelli and Tintoretto — men in whom the romantic effort oversets or strains the plastic sense to a dangerous point, a hasty effort not always sufficient or significant; and beneath these great artists we may still admire lesser men such as Filippino Lippi, Bazzi, and those later mannerists in paint and form such as Bassani, whose efforts were insufficient; Parmigianino, who is fatuous and monotonous; and Baroccio, who inherited some of the charm and all the weakness of Correggio. With these painters we must place El Greco. In the art of Theotocopuli, who was Spanish only by adoption, we notice some of the extravagant intensity latent in the Spanish character itself, which Spanish painting hardly ever reflected.

PAUL LAFOND 'LES ARTS' OCTOBER, 1906

HIS work is all passion. His quality of generalization makes him appreciate the eternal forms of nature. His evoking soul has rendered in powerful and subtle interpretations the expression of the Idea, the significance of the Word. El Greco is a sublime thinker, who by means of imagery has expressed beings and states of soul — beings, too, as complicated as we; states of souls as troubled as ours. His work is of the most emotional and captivating that art has produced. The real master is he who creates a type, a manner; and by this one should understand a new way of rendering that nature which does not itself change; a new way of expressing feelings old as the world, and consequently enriching the domain of art by a hidden treasure. El Greco is one of these privileged beings. His work brings with it surprises and sensations till now unknown. Although wholly saturated in nature, it fascinates and conquers as though a new thing.

To this primordial quality he adds an intense emotion. He, an intelli-

gence essentially emancipated, lifts spirits above this material appetite and joys. A sincere and refined melancholy rises from his productions, as from those of our own Delacroix. Before these one cannot choose but be caught and troubled by their depth, their nobility, their vivacity of expression, their grandeur. His figures, translucid and elongated out of all measure, of superhuman life, in stretched-out attitudes, with crumpled draperies, shock us like apparitions. His unhealthy tones, running from crude white to absolute black; his harmonies, almost too acute and capricious and jumbled (accords which come near to dissonance), give a fever, as it were. The master has an indefinable sense of the Invisible Life and what lies beyond, mingles in his figures in a bizarre fashion which leaves a disquieting obsession. They disconcert, they astonish, they captivate.

More than any one, save Rembrandt, does he have the sense of what is dramatic — but dramatic movement coming from simple action, ever heroic or noble, without complication; something outside what happens to be picturesque for the moment. It is from this in great part that he draws his mysterious power.

Few masters have pushed the science of composition further, though all the while dissimilating it. In his work the groups are balanced or opposed with a rare perfection. No one has shown as much care and science in the preparation of his works. Never did El Greco brush in a canvas, model a statue, design a plan for architecture, without first making numerous sketches or projects or designs. We have, for that matter, the proof in the 'Conversations on Painting' by Pacheco, which recounts that, having been to see the master at Toledo, this latter showed him the *ébauches* of his pictures, the statuettes in terra-cotta for his statues. The father-in-law of Velasquez was stupefied. "For," he writes, "who would think that Domenico Greco made studies for his work, repainted them time and time again, to the end that he might separate and disunite the tints and thus give to his canvas that look of cruel daubings in order to stimulate a greater liberty of handling and a greater power."

Let us leave to the timorous Pacheco any responsibility for his sayings; but could one expect anything else from the weak and untemperamental, petty master?. . . .

Why should Domenikos Theotokopuli have left Italy when he was beginning to make himself known, where the future smiled on him, pledging herself to him under happy auspices? On what occasion did he leave the Eternal City, where he could not have lacked for friends and protectors? Had not the capital of the world all which should hold a young and enthusiastic artist? *Chef d'œuvres* were there to be met at every step, those of past civilizations as well as those of the hardly-ended Renaissance. According to the saying of Montaigne, who visited Rome but a little later, Rome was then the cosmopolitan city where every stranger found himself at home, and where difference in nationality did not count at all.

Was the young painter called into Spain by Philip II on Titian's recommendation? The sovereign had told Titian to send some of his scholars to him.

Or was it suggested to El Greco to try to win the competition for the decoration of the Cathedral of Toledo? Or did he come of himself, drawn by that need for novelty and for adventure which was so common with the artists of past centuries? Who knows? All is mist and shadow in these days of El Greco's infancy and youth.

GUSTAVE GEOFFROY 'LES MUSÉES D'EUROPE: MADRID'

GRECO'S admiration for Titian, Palma, Bassano, Tintoretto, made place for a passionate liking for direct vision of things and of people. He painted naïvely, strongly, what he saw; and his dryness, his harshness, are of a strange, new kind. He has not given up color; he shows it in the light, and he is extraordinarily luminous. There is nothing sinister; on the other hand, it is a hymn to light. The drawing is sometimes deformed; the people are stretched out beyond all measure. El Greco was evidently striving for a decorative aspect, and, like all searchers, he happened to deceive himself.

This stretching-out came to him through Italy from Tintoretto, have I said? And through Tintoretto from Michael Angelo. But one can pardon an error in a great, passionate artist so admirably gifted with skill in grouping figures, in distributing the pure and greatly simplified colorations of his palette; to give to all these faces that expression of passion, of ecstasy, of violence, and of ravishment.

Despite two absent *chefs d'œuvre*, one finds El Greco at Madrid with both his faults and his qualities which belong to his anxious genius. He is there with religious pictures, 'The Baptism of Christ,' 'The Crucifixion,' 'The Resurrection,' 'Christ Dead in the Arms of the Father,' and one sees with astonishment this religious painting of so triumphant an aspect, which seems sonorous with trumpet-calls — these shadowed skies, these chalky lights, these little heads; and amid the movement and the tumult are charming expressions, that of the blonde Magdalen at the foot of the Cross, of a Mary in blue and red, of saints, of angels, of youths, and little maids with baby faces, the mouth small, the nose tip-tilted, the eyes wide open.

You see images of saints, St. Basil, St. Francis, St. Anthony, and St. Paul, like statues, or like heads of statues, of worm-eaten wood, or of moist and mossy granite. There is something Gothic about Greco. And then if you have passed into the hall of portraits, you find again people like the spectators in the 'Burial of the Count of Orgaz'— black *pourpoints*, white ruffs, gray faces with pointed beards and eyes which start out from the serious faces. Such are the portraits of 'A Doctor,' who holds a book; of Don Rodrigo Vazquez, President of Castille; of him whom one might call the 'Man with a Sword,' a young and grave physiognomy, one hand on the breast, the guard of a sword just visible.

I leave El Greco with the feeling that he was before all a painter, and that the artist in him was double: an observer, fond of the sharpest, the harshest reality; a decorator, ambitious to make light blaze from the walls.

The Works of El Greco

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PLATES

'THE ANNUNCIATION' PLATE I

A VERY characteristic example of El Greco, of a certain charm, and yet illustrating very clearly various of his faults. The arms and heads are of that curious, pulled-out quality which we have come to associate with him; but note, in the left arm of the angel, that the faults of drawing are those of exaggeration rather than lack of perception; that is, the contour is expressive, but the thick parts of the arm are made too wide in relation to the thinner parts. There is considerable knowledge of construction in the way the wrist is attached to the hand, only the thing is done carelessly.

The composition is well balanced and original. Indeed, it is interesting to note how far El Greco has departed from the conventional arrangement of the Annunciation used by almost every Italian painter from Giotto to Da Vinci.

'PORTRAIT OF CARDINAL TAVERA' PLATE II

AGAIN a most characteristic head. It illustrates, among other things, El Greco's tendency to paint heads thin and long drawn out. In this respect he was quite different from his Venetian masters, who, if anything, erred on the opposite of dumpiness.

This *glabre* and pallid face is at first sight rather forbidding. Yet there is much of interest in it. The character is of a peculiar and highly specialized type. El Greco was particularly successful in rendering sympathetically the character of churchmen, and this head is no exception to that rule. Note particularly the peculiar and specialized character of the weary eyes; the singular mouth, and the long nose; also the modeling about the temple and again under the cheek-bone and about the muscles round the mouth.

The hand is made with that singular ineptitude which at times characterized the Greek.

'THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN' PLATE III

A VERY characteristic example of El Greco in that there are admirable bits in it and again other pieces of deplorably careless rendering. For instance, the drapery about the Virgin does not impress one as at all well expressed, while, on the other hand, certain of the heads appear remarkably well done. Note particularly the saint gazing upward and the bald head leaning forward.

The composition may be a little reminiscent of Titian's 'Assumption,' but in details is quite different. Its chief fault is that the canvas is frankly divided into two pictures, with no subtle binding together of the two. As in most of El Greco's pictures, the realistic heads in the lower part are much more successful than the more or less idealized rendering of the upper half.

'PORTRAIT OF CARDINAL SFORZA PALLAVICINO' PLATE IV

PAINTED on a rather coarse canvas, apparently prepared with a red ground. The handling in the whites is rather impasto, apparently made with oil paints, though possibly with tempora glaze.

The composition, with its arrangement of head and hands, is effective, if curious. Note that the left hand holds two books. The head is distinguished in character and is an evident likeness, though constructed after El Greco's peculiar fashion. The chair and book, though curious in drawing, are in paint quality very much as Velasquez might have done them. The technique is quite direct, although one observes signs of glazing on the mouth, the tips of the fingers, and in some of the shadows. The color quality of the white and black vestments, the greenish chair, and the brown background are particularly fine, although the shadows of the white are rather brownish.

In sum, this is one of the finest of El Greco's portraits. His good qualities show in it to the best advantage, and his defects add a pleasing quaintness.

'THE NATIVITY' PLATE V

THIS is introduced as one of the most extreme examples of El Greco's art. The drawing of some of the pieces, as, for instance, the cherub in foreshortening, the leg of the kneeling shepherd, the side of the Madonna's head, is unbelievable. At the same time, the group is well composed and possibly was the *Plan type* on which like subjects by Ribera and by Murillo were built up. Observe that the figures are lit by radiance from the Infant Jesus. This idea may have been borrowed from the famous 'La Notte' of Correggio. Indeed, the main lines of the Greek's composition are very similar to that of the Italian's: the lighting is imagined rather than studied from nature. It would be impossible that the face and arm of the kneeling shepherd should be so lit by light from the Child.

The face of the Virgin, despite its singular drawing, has a certain charm, and the head of St. Joseph is eminently Grecoesque, looking, indeed, more like a fierce Jeremiah than a meek Joseph.

'ST. BASIL' PLATE VI

THIS is one of the figures of saints to which Geoffroy somewhat flippantly refers as being worm-eaten. Despite the excessive smallness of the head, perhaps because of it, the figure is not lacking in a certain severe dignity. The hands, again, though extremely small, are characteristic, that holding the staff being perhaps the more successful of the two. The landscape background should be noted as being exceptionally fine, especially to the left side of the saint. It suggests the sort of landscape which Velasquez was later to paint, and is altogether of a different, more modern sentiment than the landscape backgrounds of El Greco's Venetian masters. The embroidery on the vestments, of a singularly high degree of finish, is possibly the work of an assistant. The head of the saint, though still characteristic of the painter, is one of his best constructed and most soberly painted performances.

'PORTRAIT OF A PHYSICIAN' PLATE VII

ANOTHER of El Greco's long faces, but what expression of character lies in the cold, pale, phlegmatic face! The eyes are interesting as being done in a manner half way, as it were, from the Venetian convention and from Velasquez's pure light and shade. The eye is, for the matter of that, well expressed in light and shade, but the nuances of modeling in the half-light do not appear well expressed. Titian, on the other hand, never quite broke away from the old convention of drawing the eye like a button-hole; and while his vision was so acute that eventually he made a good eye, one will find in studying one of his heads painted in the same position as this that the eye is not so simply and frankly stated in mere light and shade as with El Greco.

The head is particularly well done, and in its distinction and character suggests some that Velasquez later painted.

'PORTRAIT OF CARDINAL DON FERNANDO NIÑO DE GUEVARA' PLATE VIII

IN some respects the most successful, at the least the most complete, of Greco's portraits. The stuffs are rendered with great skill. Note the painting of lace, which is done very freely yet suggestively, in manner more like Velasquez than like the Venetian masters. The textures and quality of the skirt and cape are remarkably rendered. The head is of a peculiar character, which is very well expressed. A slight expression of slyness may be caused by the eyes looking sideways toward the spectator, although the mouth as well looks as if it belonged to no simple-minded priest. As to the hands, one, the prelate's left, seems to have caused the painter a good deal of trouble and is even now not wholly successful. The other one is better.

'HEAD OF A MAN' PLATE IX

ONE of the most successful of El Greco's single heads. The face is full of character and quite sufficiently well drawn. Note, however, that the man's right eye is considerably higher than his left. This is a detail which mediocre painters almost always get right, but of which Greco apparently was oblivious. The edges of the hair against the background are very well studied and in a peculiarly modern way; that is, El Greco, unlike his Venetian masters, apparently got his edges by sheer brushwork, where these latter would have painted the thing more or less hard and then achieved their soft edge by glazings and retouchings.

The ruff is treated in a broad, almost impressionistic, way, rather than in the somewhat *meticuleux* way of Titian.

'CHRIST DEAD IN THE ARMS OF GOD' PLATE X

THIS is one of the most characteristic of El Greco's compositions, illustrating very well both his merits and defects. The composition is hardly so interesting as some of his, yet it very clearly indicates the intention of the picture. The drawing is singular, like all of the Greek master's. It is said that he had a defect of vision which made him see everything a little twisted. At the same time, the construction is well understood, showing the artist's close

study of Michael Angelo. Bits like the elbow, the wrist, and the knee of the dead Christ are done with understanding and with considerable *finesse*. The expression of the heads is well indicated, the character of both the principal figures being well searched and studied.

A LIST OF EL GRECO'S PAINTINGS IN VARIOUS GALLERIES

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